



Bill Gradle,
NRCS State Conservationist



CONGRESSMAN DONALD MANZULLO Conservation Update in Illinois Congressional District

16



Spring 2000

Resource Planning Guidebook

NRCS has created an invaluable tool to help local constituents better address local community and watershed issues. It's called the "Resource Planning Guidebook," or RPG for short. In it are a series of factsheets and information guides to help local resource planning steering committees successfully complete resource planning.



Many communities and residents in Northwest Illinois are already involved in or beginning resource planning efforts needed to address issues such as flooding, water quality, open space needs, and others. With the tools in the "RPG," these committees will be successful.

Some of the issues covered in the Guidebook include:

- Working with the Media
- Building Local Ownership of Resource Plans
- Listening Skills
- Conflict Management
- Defining the Planning Area
- Identifying Stakeholders for the Planning Committee

NRCS State Conservationist Bill Gradle is pleased with the Guidebook contents. "This is the 'toolkit' locally led groups will use to address the issues their communities are facing. We've pulled together a volume of tips, guides, and processes that will ensure successful plans and projects across the state," comments Gradle. The Guidebook has received such praise from other conservationists across the nation that NRCS is considering national distribution.

NRCS State Conservationist Bill Gradle and Brent Manning, IDNR Director, signed an MOU solidifying their commitment as partners in natural resource protection at the Agriculture Day celebration at the State Fair.



"T" By 2000

For the past decade, the goal of the Illinois Conservation Partnership has been to bring soil loss levels in Illinois down to, or beneath, tolerable levels, or "T" by the year 2000. Well, the year 2000 is here, so where are our soil loss levels? "I can't say that all soil loss on cropland is down to 'T,'" says NRCS State Conservationist Bill Gradle. "The data we've seen, and the data we've collected with the help of IDOA tells us we came close, but we still have work to do."

Across the state, erosion levels are at "T" on about 86% of cropland. "T" means erosion is occurring at a rate that ensures the soil's long-term productivity. Keep in mind that "T" soil loss data only considers sheet and rill erosion--it does NOT include other very common and problematic types of erosion, such as classic "gully" erosion or streambank erosion. Increased application of conservation practices, made possible through additional program funds and support, will give producers incentives and financial means to put more conservation on the ground and reach the 100% goal. The Clinton Administration's new "Conservation Security Program" concept may make the "T" by 2000 goal a reality by increasing conservation program funding in FY 2001.

SWCD Legislation Impacts Your Urban Constituents

The Illinois Senate and House of Representatives passed House Bill 2112 which amends the Soil and Water Conservation District Act to provide that all areas within each county are to be considered within the boundaries of their local SWCD.

The purpose of this legislation is to allow SWCDs to serve ALL residents within the entire county. The services SWCDs can make available to residents may include issues such as subdivision development ordinances, construction site erosion control ordinances, etc. With towns, villages, and municipalities now included within Districts, the number of clients and communities able to receive natural resource assistance is expanded. The role and importance of Districts in the scheme of things—land use planning, soil erosion and sediment control issues, farmland preservation issues, simple assistance to homeowners, education and outreach initiatives—will increase.

Keep in mind, however, that this legislation will not result in any increases in local property taxes. No new funds will be levied in order to support this expanded client base. SWCD's receive their support and funding through grant funds appropriated to the Illinois Department of Agriculture.

NRCS Has Help for Wet Basements

NRCS just produced a brochure, "Drainage Around Your Home."

The brochure targets homeowners who may be experiencing problems in their home due to flooding or wet basements. NRCS and SWCD Field Offices often receive visits from "non-farming clients" who need ideas or simple solutions to this very common problem.



State Conservationist Bill Gradle says their needs are real and we can help them solve their problems. "NRCS' experience with soil and water can provide some very simple ideas and techniques that any homeowner can apply to reduce wetness problems. With this brochure, they can take the information they need home with them and put it to work."

The information provided in the brochure is also available on the NRCS Homepage. In addition to providing information homeowners can use, the NRCS also provides valuable tips for individuals having new homes constructed. There are techniques that can be applied during construction that will help avoid flooding or wet basement problems before they start. Visit www.il.nrcs.usda.gov today!

Urban Manual

NRCS' Urban Manual continues to be a crucial document in controlling soil erosion and sediment in Congressional District 16. The NRCS Urban Manual, a manual that contains the standards and specifications for soil erosion and sediment control techniques used in urban environments, is continually updated and improved as a valuable conservation tool. NRCS formed a committee from various stakeholders in urban areas which provides input



and feedback on ways to improve the manual and make it more valuable to local units of government and other consultants and engineers who use the manual as they establish conservation provisions and structures that control soil erosion and sediment movement from construction sites in communities. Updates were sent to more than 300 contacts this summer and during the holidays.

These updates are a service erosion control specialists need and want in Illinois. NRCS is meeting that need.

The Manual contains practices that help control water, reduce flooding, and control soil erosion and sediment movement on construction sites. A recent update on standards and the addition of new practices has been distributed to more than 300 interested parties. Demand for updates on this Manual indicates that erosion control in urban settings is a growing priority in Illinois.

Buffer Strips



NRCS has a national initiative to have private landowners establish buffer strips on their farms, along creeks and streams, and fields. Buffer strips are a valuable part of any conservation system. They help reduce erosion, catch sediment before it enters watercourses, improve water quality, and provide habitat for many different species of wildlife.

To date, Illinois landowners have established 98,320 acres of buffers. The state goal has been set at 393,280 acres. Goals for the next few years are as follows:

2000	24,997 acres
2001	49,995 acres
2002	49,995 acres

Can we accomplish these goals? NRCS says "YES!" Buffers are a good economic and environmental investment for farmers. The cost-share and incentives for installing buffers is a popular option and NRCS feels reaching the goals is definitely possible. While Illinois' landowners have already indicated a great interest in buffers, there are still many farms in need of the protection buffers can provide. NRCS will continue to work with private landowners and work towards the 2000 goals.



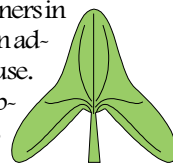
CREP Going Strong

Interest in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) continues to grow. Recently, the LaMoine River Watershed area was added to the list of eligible CREP areas, expanding a great opportunity for conservation and financial assistance to a number of landowners in the Illinois River watershed area.

Like the ever-popular CRP, CREP offers even better incentives for landowners willing to make longer or even permanent commitments of their marginal or floodplain cropland. CREP offers the usual FSA cost-share and rental payments, the usual NRCS technical assistance and planning help, but adds even more incentive payments from the state of Illinois. "For areas that aren't highly productive or areas that are so close to the river that they flood frequently, CREP is the best bet out there," says NRCS' State Farm Bill Coordinator Paula Hingson. According to Hingson, CREP is only available in a few states, so she's glad Illinois is one of them. "It's been a great program and a great tool for getting conservation on some very crucial areas in the Illinois River watershed," adds Hingson.

WRP Signup Interest in District 16

Strong interest and success of the Wetland Reserve Program can be found in Congressional District 16. Winnebago County has a landowner who has entered 664 acres into WRP, and more landowners in Boone County have added an additional 269 acres to the cause. McHenry County has contributed as well--enrolling 368



acres in WRP. That's more than 1,300 acres entered into easements that will help protect crops and communities from flooding.

"What's happening in Congressional District 16 is exactly what WRP is designed to do-- restore large contiguous sections of floodplain areas to wetlands. In the process, we provide protection against flooding and create top quality habitat for wildlife," says Bill Gradle, NRCS State Conservationist.

WRP is a win-win situation as long as federal funding and other state partners are adequate to meet the needs of clients. In many areas of the state, applicants wishing to enroll acreage are waiting to see if NRCS will receive sufficient funds to purchase the easements and begin the restoration work.

Conservation "JoDaviness Style"

Slow that water down! That's the challenge of reducing streambank erosion; slowing down water so that it doesn't take the bank with it. That's what these rock structures, called "bendway weirs" do here in JoDaviness County. As water comes down Apple River Creek, these structures reduce the velocity of the water. It's a simple concept that not only reduces the amount of sediment stripped from the streambank, but also improves water quality and habitat. This is a conservation practice that is effective, reasonably inexpensive, and stands the test of time.

Soil Survey Update News



Updated soil survey data and resources are coming to District 16! The final product provides soil data needed for GIS systems and land use planning on CD rom. The CD includes all the data and software needed to select, view, and print out data. The final product for Winnebago County is scheduled to be delivered this spring. Boone County is the latest county in the state of Illinois to sign an agreement to create a digital soil survey. Boone County can expect its CD in 2004 Both JoDaviness and McHenry Counties data was certified last year.

For more information on the status of soil surveys in your congressional district, please feel free to email NRCS' State Soil Scientist at Bob.McLeese@il.usda.gov

A Satisfied Customer!

Landowner John Jeschke, from Northern Stephenson County, worked with NRCS to construct an earthen diversion. It was placed near a property line in an attempt to redirect erosion and runoff from an newly constructed (and very effective) grassed waterway located upstream. The purpose was to capture the water flows leaving the upstream field and keep it from inundating the lower field.

The diversion structure was successfully installed with the technical assistance of the NRCS and Stephenson County SWCD staff. According to the landowner, a four-inch rain event resulted in NO damage or flooding from the upstream neighbor, who has not installed conservation practices on the land. The only evidence was an accumulation of sediment in the diversion channel, which was quickly and easily repaired.

The landowner is happy with the effectiveness of the diversion. "Had I NOT installed that diversion, the storms we've had would have devastated my crops," he reported. "It's the best thing I could have done!"

Aging Dams

Sprinkled along the rivers and valleys of almost every state in the nation—including Illinois—are small flood control dams. These dams and flood control reservoirs are protecting communities all across the country. Many serve as "multipurpose" structures, providing parks, ball fields, and other recreational facilities since they only fill up with water when the floodwaters come.

There are 10,400 such dams in the U.S. Many constructed years ago—some as much as 40 to 50 years ago. They have done well, protected many from floods that would have destroyed their homes, communities, and lives. These watershed structures provide public benefits worth about \$800 million every year. In Illinois there are 64 upstream flood control dams in 14 watersheds which protect communities and citizens on more than 645,000 acres of land. The problem is that these structures, built 40 or more years ago were designed and built with a 50 year lifespan. What that means is that these structures are in trouble. And so are the communities they've been faithfully protecting. By the year 2000, 1,200 of the nation's flood control structures will require significant restoration.

NRCS Directory

for Congressional District 16

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Asst. State Conservationist	James Tillman
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Asst. State Conservationist--	Bob Dean
Field Operation District #4	(309) 342-5138
Asst. State Conservationist--	Lue A. Walters
Community Assistance	(309) 452-2492
District Conservationist--	Jerry Misk
Jo Daviess County	(815) 858-3418
District Conservationist--	Jim Ritterbusch
Stephenson County	(815) 235-2161
District Conservationist--	Ed Johnston
Winnebago County	(815) 987-4247
District Conservationist--	Lewis Nichols
Boone County	(815) 544-2677
District Conservationist--	Dave Brandt
McHenry County	(815) 338-0099
District Conservationist--	Dan Pierce
Ogle County	(815) 732-6127
Soil Survey Project Leader	Steve Elmer
Rock Falls MLRA Project	(815) 625-3417

In Illinois there are 11 dams that are 40-44 years old and another 16 that are 30-39 years old. Another 28 dams are 20-29 years old and will need attention within the next decade. The structures are aging as sediment weakens the structural soundness of the dams and threatens farmland and residential areas that have been built up over the years. Some sites will only require minimal repairs and maintenance to function properly. Others will need more intense attention, and in a few states, some dams may need to be entirely rebuilt.

"These structures have served our communities well for many years," says NRCS State Conservationist Bill Gradle. "They have paid for themselves many times over in protection and peace of mind." Gradle encourages community leaders to take action needed to ensure the longevity of any flood control structures in their area. "It's a good investment for rural Illinois and urban Illinois. You don't wait to get health insurance until you're in intensive care," adds Gradle. For more details, look up House Resolution 728, "Small Watershed Rehabilitation Amendments Act of 1999.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service, formerly the Soil Conservation Service, works hand-in-hand with the American people to conserve natural resources on private lands.

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